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ABSTRACT

The National Urban League convened its third annual Youth Conference in San Diego (California) in July 1992. Of the more than 200 young attendees, 137 completed the survey that is the basis of this analysis. It examines the attitudes of young African Americans regarding academic achievement, peer-group relations, and social issues. Demographic characteristics are examined as well. Respondents were nearly evenly distributed in terms of gender, and approximately 54 percent were between the ages of 14 and 16. Approximately 36 percent lived with both parents. The great majority indicated that they knew about safe sex, that they were concerned about violence, and that substantial prejudice against minority groups still exists. Issues that the overwhelming majority considered to be very important for African-American and Latino communities were (1) opportunities for a good education; (2) job training; (3) determination to succeed; (4) understanding culture and heritage; and (5) treating people and family with respect. Close behind these were the importance of high moral values, strong family ties, and creativity. The survey reveals that African-American youth represent one of the most complex and sophisticated segments of American society. Sixteen tables present survey findings in different areas. (SLD)

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1992 ANALYSIS OF YOUTH CONFERENCE OPINION SURVEY

W030213

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1992 YOUTH OPINION SURVEY

1. *INTRODUCTION*

The National Urban League convened its third annual Youth Conference in San Diego, California in July, 1992. The conference was attended by over 200 youth. A total of 137 youth completed the Opinion Survey that provides the basis for this analysis.

This analysis examines young people's attitudes regarding academic achievement, peer group relations, and social issues. Demographic characteristics are examined as well.

It is hoped that the data presented in this analysis will serve as a useful tool for youth related to advocacy, program development and research initiatives.

2. *THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CONFEREES*

The conferees were evenly distributed in terms of gender. Of the 120 respondents to this item, 62 (51.7%) were female. This represents a significant change from the 1990 and 1991 conferences, when 58.7 and 65.1% of those sampled were female. (See Table One.)

Regarding age, 63 (53.8%) of the 117 persons who answered the question related to age were between fourteen and sixteen. More than one in five conferees (22.2%) were fourteen, while about one in six (17.9%) were fifteen. Roughly one in four (23.9%) were twelve or thirteen, while 22.2% were aged seventeen to nineteen. (See Table Two.)

With respect to educational attainment, 64 (53.3%) of the 120 youth who responded to the question related to education had completed grades seven, eight or nine. Another 44 or 36.7% had completed grades ten, eleven or twelve. Only three or 2.5% had completed at lease one year of college, while seven or 5.8% had completed the sixth grade. (See Table Three.)

In terms of geography, 41 (34.2%) of the 120 youth who responded to the question related to where they came from resided in the west. Another 31 (25.8%) came from the south, while 28 or 23.3% came from the east. The remaining 20 (16.7%) came from the north. (See Table Four.)

Concerning work status, 61 (51.4%) of the 119 respondents did not work or worked sporadically at the time of the survey. Another 30 (25.2%) reported have worked during the summer, while 28 or 23.5% were employed part time throughout the year. (See Table Five.)

It is interesting to note that the largest block of young persons (37 or 31.1%) reported that they did not work. The official unemployment rate for African American youth is typically in the range of 30 to 35 percent. (See Table Five.)

On family status, 55 or 40.1% of the 137 young people sampled indicated that they lived in a female headed household. A smaller 49 or 35.8% revealed that they lived with both parents. Just under nine percent said they lived with their grandparents, while eight percent lived with a legal guardian and 5.8% lived with other relatives. (See Table Six.)

When asked to give their feelings on family structure, 81 or 74.3% of the 109 respondents indicated that they would be very satisfied in a two parent household. Only 47 or 42% of 112 respondents indicated that they would be very satisfied in a female headed household, while an even smaller 26 or 28.3% of 92 respondents said that they would be very satisfied in a male headed household (See Table Ten.)

It is interesting to note that 44 or 47.8% of the 92 respondents revealed that they would be very satisfied living in a family headed by any caring adult. In contrast, 14.1% of those sampled said they would not at all be satisfied with such an arrangement. (See Table Ten.)

Compared to other family types, this negative rate was about four times higher than the negative rating for the male headed households (3.3%) and two parent households (3.7%). It was about two and one-half times the negative rating for female headed households (5.4%.) (See Table Ten.)

Some 111 young people responded to questions related to when young women and men should become parents. About half (54 or 48.6%) thought a young lady should be between 20 and 24, while about a third (36 or 32.4%) said 25 to 29. Only 18 or 16.2% said 16 to 19. (See Table 10A.)

The figures for when young should become fathers were about the same. Some 51 respondents (45.9%) said young men should be between 20 and 24, while 38 or 34.2% said 25 to 29. Only 19 or 17.1% said 16 to 19. (See Table 14A.)

Six respondents said that maturity, not age, was the most important factor in determining when a young lady should become a mother. Seven said the same thing for young men. (See the Notes to Tables 10A and 14A.)

3. ***CONFEREE'S OPINION ON YOUTH ISSUES***

An overwhelming majority of those sampled (96% or 112 of 127) believed that a good student can also be popular. Like numbers agreed that it would be a good idea for African Americans to visit Africa (92.1%), that teen pregnancy is a major issue in the African American community (89.6%), and that rap music is a positive force for African American youth (87.3%). (See Table Nine.)

In contract, only 35.8% believed that abortions should not be legal. An even smaller 20.6% believed that many drug related problems could be solved if drugs were made legal. (See Table Nine.)

4. *CONFEREE'S RESPONSES TO BROADER SOCIAL CONCERNS*

Of the 124 young people sampled, 97.6% of 121 indicated that they pretty much knew about safe sex. An almost equally high percentage (93.6% of 117 of 125) thought special programs should exist to help Blacks to get their fair share. (See Table Eleven.)

Just above nine in ten (90.3%) thought young people were at risk of getting AIDS. Interestingly, only 64.5% have had classes about AIDS in school. (See Table Eleven.)

It is interesting to note that 85.8% of those sampled agreed that skin color is still a major issue in the African American community. Just under eight in the (78.6%) thought prejudice exists between Black young people. (See Table Eleven.)

Whereas 82.9% of those sampled thought environmental issues are one of today's (leading) concerns, a somewhat smaller 62.3% indicated that they recycled materials.

Of grave concern are the facts that 76.2% of the youth sampled knew a youth who has been shot, 70% knew a youth who has been killed, and 60.6% thought violence and crime were daily realities in their community. In light of this, it is not surprising that only 26.8% of those sampled thought guns should be legal. (See Table Eleven.)

While 72.2% of the youth sampled indicated that they follow the news most days, only 13.4% believed that the media gives a true picture of African Americans. (See Table Eleven.)

Likewise, only 15.8% of those sampled believed that the court system is fair to Blacks. A question in another section of the survey revealed that 71.6% of those sampled believed that the criminal justice system does not protect the rights of African Americans. (See Tables Eleven and 13A.)

5. *ISSUES THE CONFEREES THOUGHT WERE IMPORTANT TO IMPROVING LIFE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO COMMUNITIES.*

It is interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of the young people sampled thought the following were very important in improving life in the African American and Latino communities:

- Opportunities to Receive a Good Education (90.5%).
- Job Training (90.4%).
- Determination to Succeed (88.6%).
- Understanding Culture and Heritage (86.3%).
- Treating People and Family with Respect (84.9%).

Close behind in the tally were the following:

- ★ **High Moral Values (82.5%).**
- ★ **Strong Family Ties (78.2%).**
- ★ **Creativity (74.8%).**

While 64.8% thought that contacts and mentors were very important, only 31.5% thought the same of exciting clothes and hair style. (See Table Twelve).

6. ***CONFEREES' RANKING OF IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH***

Asked to put twelve areas in priority order using a three point ranking system, Racism and Discrimination was the leader with 130 points. Far behind were Gangs (95 points), Drug Use (94) and Ignorance (91).

Rounding out the twelve were:

- ★ Street Crime (58 points).
- ★ Poverty (45 points).
- ★ Single Parent Families (25 points).
- ★ Violence in Families (20 points).
- ★ Alcohol Use (16 points).
- ★ Suicide (13 points).

The following were ranked by the corresponding number of survey respondents:

- ★ Racism & Discrimination (29 persons).
- ★ Ignorance (22 persons).
- ★ Gangs (19 persons).
- ★ Drug Use (17 persons).
- ★ Teen Pregnancy (13 persons).
- ★ Street Crime (10 persons).
- ★ Inadequate Education (7 persons).
- ★ Poverty (5 persons).
- ★ Violence in Families (3 persons).
- ★ Single Parent Families (2 persons).
- ★ Suicide (2 persons).

No respondents assigned a number one rank to Alcohol Use.

7. *OTHERS ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE CONFEREES*

There were 51 concerns identified in an open-ended section of the survey. Of the 51, seven (13.7%) related to birth control and pregnancy and six (11.8%) were concerned with AIDS. There were four (7.8%) of each of the following issues: education, employment, drug dealing and self-esteem. (See Table Sixteen.)

8. *ATTITUDES REGARDING VOLUNTEER SERVICE AND SUCCESS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY*

The sampled respondents were about evenly split on the issue of whether young people should be required by the government to volunteer in their communities. Of 120 people sampled, 59 or 49.2% said yes and 61 or 50.8% said no. (See Table Fifteen.)

On the matter of who has the best chance to make it in American society, 78 (76.5%) of the 102 respondents sampled said White males had the best chance. Far behind were Black males and White females (7.8% each), Black females (with 6.9%), and Latino females (one percent) were viewed as having the best chance. (See Table Fourteen).

The groups who were believed to have the worse chance of making it in American society were about evenly distributed among Black females (26%), Latino females (25%), and Black males (25%). Eleven percent believe Latino males have the worst chance, while 10% said the same for White females. Only two percent placed white males in this group.

9. *OBSERVATIONS*

The data from the 1992 Youth Conference survey reaffirms a number of challenges facing the African American community in general and African American youth in particular. What the Urban League and other institutions do with young people to address these challenges will indeed help determine the fate of the nation in the years to come. It is through our youth development and leadership program, *NULITES* (National Urban League Incentives To Excel and Succeed) and other youth focused services, we have begun to meet this challenge.

Black youth attitudes on several issues are especially noteworthy. The youth surveyed, while typically from single parent and grandparent families, strongly favored two parent households. Roughly three in four youth surveyed (74.3%) indicated that this form of family was very satisfying, substantially higher than another other form.

According to this survey's results, African American youth also demonstrated considerable appreciation for active and positive family relations. Evidence of this is the fact that more than three quarters of the youth surveyed believed that treating people and family with respect and strong family ties were very important in improving life in the African American community.

The fact that more than half of the youth surveyed did not work or worked sporadically should be a cause for considerable concern. That the majority of working age African American youth cannot obtain employment has ominous implications for their future as adults and the nation's social stability and economic vitality.

We must be equally concerned by the fact that seven in ten of the youth surveyed know a youth who has been killed and more than three in four know a youth who has been shot. The regularity of violence in the African American community has left many youth hardened and numb. As adults, we are challenged to create and maintain communities where violence is exception, not the rule.

Closely related to this issue is that of Black youth's perception of the judicial system. It should be clear that the judicial system faces some serious challenges when 84.2% of the surveyed Youth Conference respondents think the system is unfair. Adults are challenged to bring real reform to the system and to make young people better informed of their rights.

It is interesting to note that the surveyed youth saw Racism & Discrimination as the most important issue facing African American youth. Their concern about this issue easily outdistanced those related to Gangs, Drug Use, and Ignorance. It suggests that American society has a long way to go before race relations and tolerance are relegated to the history books.

Perhaps racism is seen as a factor in Black men and women being thought of as having the least chance to make it in America. Combined, African American men and women made up 51% of those thought to have the worse chance to make it in American society by those surveyed at the 1992 Youth Conference. This compares to 37% for Latino men and women and 12% of White men and women.

Negative imagery could also be a factor in this perception. The survey notes that while 72% of the youth sampled followed the news regularly, only 13% thought the media gave an accurate picture of African Americans.

The negative aside, the survey points out many strengths among African American youth. More than nine in ten percent (92.1%) believed that travel to Africa is a good idea for African Americans. A like percentage (90.5%) believed that opportunities to receive a good education are very important to young people in improving life in the African American community.

In a similar vein, nearly nine in ten considered understanding heritage and culture and the determination to succeed very important factors (86.3% and 88.6%, respectively). Despite the scarcity of job opportunities, 90.4% saw job training as very important.

In short, the 1992 Youth Conference survey reveals that Black youth represent one of the most complex and sophisticated segments of American society. Survey date reinforces concerns related to race relations, violence, the media and the criminal justice system. It balances those concerns with encouraging news about Black youth's attitudes about education, job training and cultural awareness.

As the decade of the 90's continues to unfold, it is apparent that African American youth will be a major force in shaping the nation's direction. The Urban League and other institutions are challenged to mobilize youth toward positive and empowering ends.

10. *DISCUSSION*

The 1992 Youth Conference survey like those of 1990 and 1991, provides the Urban League with a wealth of data regarding the concerns and perceptions of African American youth. These perspectives cover the full spectrum of social and community concerns making them valuable front end tools for a host of advocacy, program development and research endeavors.

In addition to being a valuable advocacy and program development tool for the NUL and its 112 affiliates, this critical information shared with the youth services network may fortify efforts to meaningfully address and shape the present and future of all American youth.

Information that is used to facilitate change is indeed a powerful weapon. It is hoped that the information presented herein is an accurate reflection of the views, aspirations and opportunities facing African American youth and those who work on behalf of them.

YOUTH CONFERENCE '92
OPINION SURVEY TABLES

TABLE ONE

YOUTH CONFEREES' GENDER

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENT
Female	62	51.7
Male	58	48.3
TOTAL	*120*	*100.0*

TABLE TWO

YOUTH CONFEREES' AGE

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Twelve	13	11.1
Thirteen	15	12.8
Fourteen	26	22.2
Fifteen	21	17.6
Sixteen	16	13.7
Seventeen	14	12.0
Eighteen	11	9.4
Nineteen	1	0.9
TOTAL	*117*	*100.0*

TABLE THREE

YOUTH CONFEREES' EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

LAST GRADE COMPLETED	NUMBER	PERCENT
Sixth	7	5.8
Seventh	20	16.7
Eighth	17	14.2
Ninth	27	22.5
Tenth	17	14.2
Eleventh	19	15.8
Twelfth	10	8.3
One + Years of College	3	2.5
TOTAL	*120*	*100.0*

TABLE FOUR

WHERE THE YOUTH CONFEREES CAME FROM

REGION OF THE U.S.	NUMBER	PERCENT
North	20	16.7
South	31	25.8
East	28	23.3
West	41	34.2
TOTAL	*120*	*100.0*

TABLE FIVE

THE YOUTH CONFEREES' WORK STATUS

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Don't Work	37	31.1
Work Sporadically	24	20.2
Work Part-Time Year Round	28	23.5
Work During Summer	30	25.2
TOTAL	*119*	*100.0*

TABLE SIX

THE YOUTH CONFEREES' FAMILY STATUS

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Mother Only	55	40.1
Both Parents	49	35.8
Grandparents	12	8.8
Legal Guardian	11	8.0
Other Relatives	8	5.8
Other	2	1.5
TOTAL	*137*	*100.0*

TABLE SEVEN

ATTENDANCE AT 1991 YOUTH CONFERENCE

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Yes	21	17.4
No	100	82.6
TOTAL	*121*	*100.0*

TABLE EIGHT

MEMBERSHIP IN *NULITES*

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Member	33	27.5
Not a Member	87	72.5
TOTAL	*120*	*100.0*

TABLE NINE

OPINIONS ON ISSUES

ISSUE	AGREE		DISAGREE	
	#	%	#	%
A good student can also be popular.	122	96.0	5	4.0
It would be a good idea for African Americans to visit Africa.	116	92.1	10	7.9
Rap music is a positive force for African American youth.	110	87.3	16	12.7
Many drug related problems could be resolved if drugs were made legal.	26	20.6	100	79.4
African American musicians and entertainers are being treated unfairly because of race.	76	60.8	49	39.2
Teen pregnancy is a major issue in the African American community.	112	89.6	13	10.4
In general, abortions should not be legal.	44	35.8	79	64.2

TABLE TEN

OPINIONS ON FAMILY STRUCTURE

TYPE OF FAMILY	DEGREE OF SATISFACTION					
	VERY		SOMEWHAT		NOT AT ALL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Both Parents	81	74.3	24	22.0	4	3.7
Mother Only	47	42.0	59	52.7	6	5.4
Father Only	26	28.3	63	68.5	3	3.3
Any Caring Adult	44	47.8	35	38.0	13	14.1

TABLE 10A

CONFEREES' FEELINGS ON FEMALE READINESS FOR PARENTING

AGE RANGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
16 to 19	18	16.2
20 to 24	54	48.6
25 to 29	36	32.4
30 or Older	3	2.7
TOTAL	*111*	*100.0*

NOTE: Six other respondents mentioned maturity.

TABLE 10B

CONFEREES' FEELINGS ON MALE READINESS FOR PARENTING

AGE RANGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
16 to 19	19	17.1
20 to 24	51	45.9
25 to 29	38	34.2
30 or Older	3	2.7
TOTAL	*111*	*100.0*

NOTE: Seven other respondents mentioned maturity.

TABLE ELEVEN

RESPONSES RELATED TO CURRENT SOCIAL ISSUES

ITEM	RESPONSE			
	YES		NO	
	#	%	#	%
I follow the news most days.	91	72.2	35	27.8
I think the media gives a true picture of African Americans.	17	13.4	110	86.6
I think skin color is still a major issue in the African American community.	109	85.8	18	14.2
I think prejudice exists between Black people.	99	78.6	27	21.4
I think special programs should exist to help Blacks get their fair share.	117	93.6	8	6.4
I think the court system is fair to Blacks.	19	15.8	101	84.2
I think guns should be legal.	33	26.8	90	73.2
I think violence and crime are daily realities in my community.	77	60.6	50	39.4
I know a youth who has been shot.	96	76.2	30	23.8
I know a youth who has been killed.	91	70.0	39	30.0
I think young people are at risk of getting AIDS.	112	90.3	12	9.7
I pretty much know about safe sex.	121	97.6	3	2.4
I think environmental issues are one of today's concerns.	102	82.9	21	17.1
I have had classes about AIDS in school.	78	64.5	43	35.5
I recycle.	76	62.3	46	37.7

TABLE TWELVE

ISSUES IMPORTANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN IMPROVING LIFE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO COMMUNITIES

ISSUE	IMPORTANCE					
	VERY		SOMEWHAT		NOT AT ALL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Job Training	103	90.4	10	8.8	1	0.9
Contacts and Mentors	79	64.8	39	32.8	4	3.3
Determination to Succeed	109	88.6	13	10.6	1	0.8
Creativity	86	74.8	28	24.3	1	0.9
High Moral Values	99	82.5	17	14.2	4	3.3
Strong Family Ties	93	78.2	22	18.5	4	3.4
Exciting Clothes and Hairstyles	40	31.5	51	40.2	36	28.3
Treating People and Family with Respect	101	84.9	15	12.6	3	2.6
Understanding Culture and Heritage	101	86.3	13	11.1	3	2.6
Opportunities to Receive a Good Education	105	90.5	9	7.8	2	1.7

TABLE THIRTEEN

TOP RANKED CONCERNS FACING AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH

ISSUE	RANKING OF PRIORITY (POINTS)			TOTAL POINTS
	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	
Racism & Discrimination	87	32	11	130
Teen Pregnancy	39	20	18	77
Suicide	6	0	7	13
Gangs	57	30	8	95
Street Crime	30	22	6	58
Ignorance	66	20	5	91
Violence in Families	9	8	3	20
Drug Use	51	32	11	94
Single Parent Families	6	14	6	26
Inadequate Education	21	30	15	66
Poverty	15	12	18	45
Alcohol Use	0	8	8	16

TABLE 13A

NUL YOUTH PERCEPTION OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

ITEM	NUMBER	PERCENT
Protects Rights	25	22.9
Doesn't	78	71.6
Sometimes	3	2.8
Doesn't Know	3	2.8
TOTAL	*109*	*100.0*

TABLE FOURTEEN

NUL YOUTH PERCEPTION OF WHO HAS THE BEST CHANCE TO MAKE IT IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

GROUP	BEST CHANCE		WORSE CHANCE	
	#	%	#	%
Black Males	8	7.8	25	25.0
Black Females	7	6.9	26	26.0
Latino Males	0	-	11	11.0
Latino Females	1	1.0	26	26.0
White Males	78	76.5	2	2.0
White Females	8	7.8	10	10.0
TOTAL	*102*	*100.0*	*100*	*100.0*

TABLE FIFTEEN

NUL YOUTH FEELINGS ON GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENT FOR NATIONAL/COMMUNITY SERVICE PARTICIPATION

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Yes	59	49.2
No	61	50.8
TOTAL	*120*	*100.0*

TABLE SIXTEEN

OTHER CONCERNS IDENTIFIED BY NUL YOUTH

CONCERN	NUMBER	PERCENT
AIDS	6	11.8
Birth Control & Pregnancy	7	13.7
Low Morality	4	7.8
Peer Pressure	4	7.8
Racism in Schools	3	5.9
Cancer	2	3.9
Drive By Killings	2	3.9
Single Parent Families	2	3.9
Other Issues	21	41.2
TOTAL	*51*	*100.0*

*One response per person. Issues included education, employment, drug dealing and self-esteem.

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